

IN THE CLAIMS

1.-24. (cancelled)

25. (new) A method of controlling access to potentially offensive or harmful emails comprising:

in conjunction with a program executing on a digital computer, examining a downloaded email before the email is displayed to the user; said examining operation including analyzing the email natural language content relative to a predetermined database of regular expressions to form a rating, the database including regular expressions previously associated with potentially offensive or harmful emails; and the database further including a relative weighting associated with each regular expression in the database for use in forming the rating;

comparing the rating of the downloaded email to a predetermined threshold rating; and

if the rating indicated that the downloaded email is more likely to be offensive or harmful than a an email having the threshold rating, preventing the downloaded email from being displayed to the user.

26. (new) A method according to claim 25 wherein preventing comprises blocking the downloaded email from being displayed to the user or deleting the downloaded email.

27. (new) A method according to claim 25 further comprising providing an indication of the reason that the downloaded email was prevented from display.

28. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a program, the program comprising:

a data acquisition component for acquiring meta-content from target emails into an internal database; and

an inquiry component for selecting and presenting meta-content from the internal database in response to an end-user request;

the data acquisition component including an analysis component that analyzes the content of emails corresponding to the meta-content stored in the internal database and that returns a rating for each such email based on the result of said analysis; and

means for adding said returned ratings into the internal database as additional meta-content in association with the corresponding emails.

29. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a program according to claim 28, the analysis component including:

first means for identifying natural language textual portions of the email and forming a list of words that appear in the identified natural language textual portions of the email;

a second internal database of predetermined words that are associated with unwanted commercial solicitations;

second means for querying the second internal database to determine which of the list of words has a match in the database;

third means for acquiring a corresponding weight from the second internal database for each such word having a match in the second internal database so as to form a weighted set of terms; and

fourth means for calculating a rating for the email responsive to the weighted set of terms, the calculating means including means for determining and taking into account a total number of natural language words that appear in the identified natural language textual portions of the email.

30. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a program according to claim 28, and further comprising means for including the additional meta-content in said presenting meta-content from the internal database in response to an end-user request.

31. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a program according to claim 28, and further comprising means for modifying the meta-content results presented in response to an end-user request based upon the said ratings.

32. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a computer program for use in conjunction with a program to rate an email relative to unwanted commercial solicitations, the program comprising instructions to:

identify natural language textual portions of the email and form a list of words that appear in the identified natural language textual portions of the email;

access a database of predetermined words that are associated with the unwanted commercial solicitations;

acquire a corresponding weight from the database for each such word having a match in the database so as to form a weighted set of terms; and

calculate a rating for the email responsive to the weighted set of terms, the instructions to calculate including instructions to determine and take into account a total number of natural language words that appear in the identified natural language textual portions of the email.

33. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a computer program for use in conjunction with a program to rate a email according to claim 32 and further comprising instructions to prevent the downloaded email from being displayed to the user if the rating indicated that the downloaded email is likely to include an unwanted commercial solicitation .

34. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a computer program for use in conjunction with a program to rate an email according to claim 33 further comprising instructions to block the downloaded email from being displayed to the user or instructions to delete the downloaded email.

35. (new) A computer-readable medium storing a computer program for use in conjunction with a program to rate a email according to claim 32 and further comprising instructions to store a predetermined threshold rating, and instructions to compare the calculated rating to the threshold rating to determine whether the email likely has the unwanted commercial solicitations.

36. (new) A method according to claim 32 wherein said predetermined words include words selected from the following categories: sexually themed content, potentially undesired content and pornographic content.

37. (new) A method of analyzing content of an email, the method comprising:

identifying natural language textual portions of the email;

forming a word listing including all natural language words that appear in the textual portion of the email;

for each word in the word list, querying a preexisting database of selected words to determine whether or not a match exists in the database;

for each word having a match in the database, reading a corresponding weight from the database so as to form a weighted set of terms; and

calculating a rating for the email responsive to the weighted set of terms.

38. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein the method further comprises: if the rating indicated that the downloaded email is likely to include an unwanted commercial solicitation, preventing the downloaded email from being displayed to the user.

39. (new) A method according to claim 38 wherein preventing comprises blocking the downloaded email from being displayed to the user or deleting the downloaded email.

40. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein the method further comprises:

identifying meta-content in the email; and

identifying words from the meta-content of the email in the word list so that the meta-content is taken into account in calculating the rating for the email.

41. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein said calculating step includes:

summing the weighted set of terms together to form a sum;

multiplying the sum by a predetermined modifier to scale the sum;

determining a total number of words on the email; and

dividing the scaled sum by the total number of words on the email to form the rating.

42. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein said preexisting database of selected words include words selected from the following categories: sexually themed content, potentially undesired content and pornographic content.

43. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein the rating is with respect to whether the email is an unwanted commercial solicitation.

44. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein the rating is with respect to whether email is an unwanted commercial solicitation and, based on the rating, the action is to delete the email.

45. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein based on the rating the action is to delete the email.

46. (new) A method according to claim 37 wherein the rating is with respect to whether the email is one or more of pornographic, sexually themed, or offensive.

47. (new) A method of controlling access to emails potentially including an unwanted commercial solicitation comprising:

in conjunction with a program executing on a digital computer, examining a downloaded email before the email is displayed to the user; said examining operation including analyzing the email natural language content relative to a predetermined database of regular expressions to form a rating, the database including regular expressions relating to unwanted commercial solicitations; and the database further including a relative weighting associated with each regular expression in the database for use in forming the rating;

comparing the rating of the downloaded email to a predetermined threshold rating; and

if the rating indicated that the downloaded email is more likely to include an unwanted commercial solicitation than an email having the threshold rating, preventing the downloaded

email from being displayed to the user.

48. (new) A method according to claim 47 wherein preventing comprises blocking the downloaded email from being displayed to the user or deleting the downloaded email.
49. (new) A method according to claim 47 wherein, if the downloaded email is prevented from display, displaying an alternative email to the user.
50. (new) A method according to claim 49 wherein preventing comprises blocking the downloaded email from being displayed to the user or deleting the downloaded email.
51. (new) A method according to claim 47 further comprising providing an indication of the reason that the downloaded email was prevented from display.
52. (new) A method according to claim 47 wherein said regular expressions include expressions selected from the following categories: sexually themed content, potentially undesired content and pornographic content.